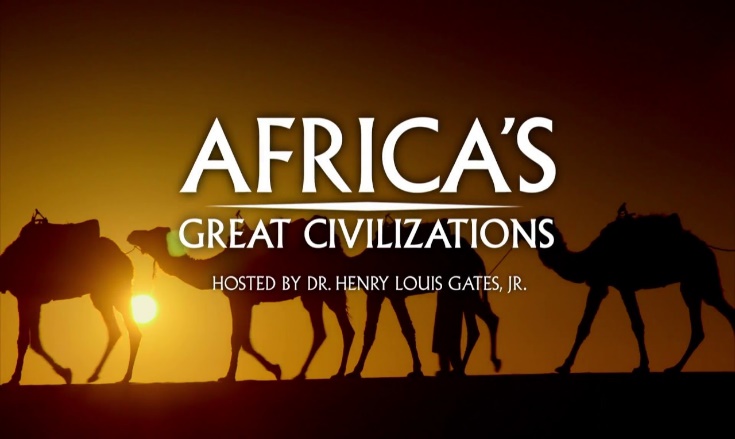
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***Reading 4.5:***

**Africa’s Great Civilizations, Episode #4 “Cities”**

*Summary of Episode #4:*

Hour four shines a light on the powerful, cosmopolitan cities that dotted Africa at a time when Europe was in its Middle Ages. From 1000 to 1600, a golden age evolves in the expansion of commerce, wealth and prosperity across Africa, and, along with this, the building of new cities and the founding of new powerful states.

Host Henry Louis Gates, Jr. picks up the story first on East Africa's Swahili coast, where sailors of wooden seagoing ships, or dhows, mastered the seasonal monsoon winds to develop a complex maritime trade spanning the Indian Ocean from the nearby Middle East to India, with indirect trade connections as far afield as China. These interactions facilitated the birth of a distinctive form of Islam in East Africa, one that influenced local society from its religious practices to the formation of the Kiswahili language. Islam would spread with trade and become the religion of the Swahili towns and cities, but with several ways of observing Islam drawn from the Bantu cultural roots of the Swahili.

A focal point of this coastline's thriving civilization was the legendary city-state of Kilwa, an island port off present-day Tanzania, whose authority stretched the length of the Swahili coast and is representative of the flourishing material and cultural world of Swahili civilization during this period. In 1331, Ibn Battuta, a great explorer and chronicler of the Muslim world, describes Kilwa as one of the most beautiful and well-constructed towns in the world. In Kilwa, Gates visits the Great Mosque and the sprawling palace of Husuni Kubwa, built in the 14th century to house Sultan Al-Hasan Ibn Sulaiman.

Gates travels next to the ruins of the architectural wonder of Great Zimbabwe, once a major city in southeast Africa whose proximity to some of the ancient world's most extensive gold workings fortified its rise among the Shona-speaking people of Zimbabwe, making it the continent's Eldorado. Here, the export of gold and ivory drove trade, and the city's great royal palace, dating back to the 13th century, stood as the largest pre-colonial structure in the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa. From its height to its unique stone architecture, this palace remains as, per heritage specialist Dr. Edward Matenga, "the pride of all Africans."

Crossing over to Africa's west coast, Gates takes viewers to Nigeria, where Benin City was once the center of a kingdom that controlled more than 20,000 square miles. At Benin City's heart was the Royal Palace of the Oba of Benin, expanded by the 15th century warrior king, Ewuare the Great, who also ordered the engineering of an extraordinary earthworks system to strengthen Benin City as a military centre. Eventually encompassing more than 500 surrounding villages, this earthworks system exceeded the length of the Great Wall of China. But it was the collection of bronze (or brass) heads, treasures of classical Benin art, many of which were commissioned by Ewuare himself, that provide the prelude to a moment ultimately altering the course of African history: the arrival of the Portuguese late in the 15th century.

Back on the Swahili Coast, Gates describes how, in 1505 A.D., a fleet of Portuguese ships under Captain Francisco de Almeida helped to cripple the power and wealth of Kilwa, leaving the Portuguese to exploit and disrupt the region's Indian Ocean trading system. In Ethiopia, a new era of political and Christian religious expansion takes place. A Portuguese mission arrives, seeking an alliance with the Christian stronghold of Ethiopia, and hoping to make contact with Prester John, a mythical ruler who, according to European legends dating back to the 12th century, descended from one of the Magi and possessed the Fountain of Youth. Catholic Portuguese visitors who arrive in Ethiopia in the 16th century see Ethiopia as an ally in their struggles with Muslims over trade in Africa and the Indian Ocean, and they provide a small military contingent to help Ethiopia defeat the neighboring Muslim sultanate of Adal in 1543 A.D.

But there was a catch: the Portuguese wished to displace Ethiopia's home-grown Orthodox Church and bring the kingdom under the authority of the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church. While this result was seemingly secured through the conversion eighty years later of the Ethiopian emperor, Susenyos, the turn against the Ethiopian Orthodox Church tore the kingdom apart. After Susenyos was driven from the throne in 1632 A.D., the task of reunifying Ethiopia fell to his son, Fasilides. The new emperor was quick to re-establish orthodoxy, seeding a cultural renaissance in Ethiopia's new capital city, Gondar. The hour concludes within the walls of Fasil Ghebbi, Gondar's palace complex, and Fasilides' Bath, whose waters remain at the heart of modern Ethiopia's most important religious festival, Timkat.

**Viewing Notes for Episode #4 “Cities”**

*Instructions: For each heading, write down notes about information that you believe is important to helping you answer, and support your answer, to our Q4 question “What were the civilizations of Africa like during Era 2?”*

**Zanzibar**

**Kilwa**

**Great Zimbabwe**

**Benin City**

**Arrival of the Portuguese**

**The Portuguese in Ethiopia**

